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U.N. Air Force To Gather Facts?

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In the way of fair warning—right here at the top—what follows may sound like one of those calls for moral rearmament. But it is meant to be one man's plea for a new look at ways to use some of our fantastic war technology for peace.

Watching the so-called United Nations debate on the Mideast War did it. There they were, full grown diplomats, dancing around the truth in the air conditioned U.N. while young men were dying on the searing plains of Sinai and Syria. Even opposing lawyers in a murder trial, in pre-trial meetings with the judge, manage to block out the rough dimensions of the case and agree on exhibits of evidence once the trial starts.

At the UN, there seems to be no agreement on the most basic, self-evident truths, far less exhibits to build one side of the case. Arab spokesmen are still claiming U.S. airplanes fought in the Mideast war, even though the Russians know better and no doubt have so told the Arabs.

WHILE the right to lie may be one of the inalienable rights of diplomacy, is there anything wrong with the UN's building a deterrence against it? The hardware for doing it is already in hand, even though it was built with war—not peace—in mind.

The United States, for example, has developed cameras for its spy satellites which can pick out objects on the ground as small as dinner plates. Reconnaissance airplanes can also photograph objects to the side of the flight path, not just those on the ground directly below. It is no trick at all to mount such powerful cameras on satellites, airplanes or helicopters. What would be wrong with a UN reconnaissance air force with the mission of gathering hard evidence about what was going on in crisis areas?

Would not an unarmed helicopter, painted United Nations blue, have helped contain the UN debate if its crew reported that no U.S. aircraft took off from Sixth Fleet carriers during the first days of the Arab-Israeli war? Granted, President Eisenhower's Open Skies proposal never got anywhere. And even the NATO allies could not get together on the multilateral force. But the nuclear stakes are higher now. Every brushfire risks a Cuba-type confrontation between Russia and the United States. The little powers consistently have been able to drag the big powers into their fights.

Happily, during the Mideast war, Russia shadowed the Sixth Fleet and knew Egypt was lying about our involvement. But information on what the U.S., Russia and other big powers are up to may not be as easy to come by the next time.

The UN Air Force could be headed by prestigious airmen of several nations — apolitical types like America's Charles Lindbergh. Their job would be to gather the facts and certify them for the UN, leaving it to the diplomats to interpret.

This fact-finding would take place before a war started, and hopefully help prevent it. Unlike NATO's multilateral force, the UN reconnaissance aircraft would carry no weapons. Helicopters would probably be less provocative than airplanes.

Ralph J. Bunche, UN Undersecretary for Special Political Affairs, is not exactly smitten by the idea of a standing UN reconnaissance force. Asked about it by *The Washington Post*, he said, "We can never get into the realm of military intelligence. We would be out of business everywhere if we became a channel for military intelligence."

HE conceded that the UN Emergency Force did use Caribou and Otter for reconnaissance along the Gaza Strip before Egypt demanded that the force withdraw. This Gaza Strip reconnaissance, however, was what the military calls tactical reconnaissance. It is undertaken to support a specific operation. This is different from strategic reconnaissance; or in UN terms, the policy of trying to gather the hard facts about a situation.

If the UN could agree on using aerial reconnaissance, even in a limited way, other technology might be exploited next. There is no reason why the UN could not keep in touch with world capitals by communications satellites, for instance. Madame Gandhi and President Nasser, without ever leaving their capitals, could talk to UN diplomats in New York via a TV screen in UN headquarters. As it is now, the UN from the outside reminds this reporter of the Hillside, N.J., Township Committee arguing over whether the local cork factory was polluting the town without looking at the smoke — not a deliberative body with the responsibility of preventing world incineration.